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Parasocial Interaction, Perceived Celebrity Credibility, and Attitudes towards Gossip as
Predictors of Audiences' Tendency to Gossip

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Abstract

Rationally, spreading gossip is a human nature especially in the era of mass communication. The low price of printing accelerates the spread of gossip. Stars come into people's sights under the impetus of the medium. This study tested three factors of the tendency to gossip, including PSI, PCC and ATG on the Chinese social network sites. The findings of presented study actuate previous studies on the tendency to gossip, and we applied the TPB as the basis theory to conduct the research. It is novel to integrate the three predictors PSI, PCC, and ATG to examine how they influence TTG concurrently within new media situation. In particular, an originally designed model aims testing the multiple interactions among variables has been brought forward. Besides the model, the study also tested how PCC, PSI, and ATG work on TTG separately, trying to further our understandings of individuals' TTG on SNSs in communication field.

Introduction

On the August 14th, 2016, a famous Chinese “grassroots” star, Wang Baoqiang, published a Sina Weibo to make an announcement to declare the divorce with his wife Ma Rong. The event caused a violent social debate. A lot of social network users paid close attention to it and participated in the words war of this celebrity gossip online.

Spreading gossip is a human nature especially in the era of mass communication. The low price of printing accelerates the spread of gossip. Stars come into people's sights under the impetus of the medium. From print to broadcast and television, then to Internet and social networking, star divorce, derailment always can raise people's eyeball. The development of social network has changed this society a lot, from people's behavior to social structure. It becomes an ideal platform to spread gossip (Okazaki, Rubio, & Campo, 2014).

Different scholars study gossip on social network in different aspects. The online gossip propensity is examined in information value, friendship value, entertainment value and social enhancement value (Okazaki, Rubio, & Campo, 2014). Some scholars focus on the gossip blogs. Sánchez Cuervo (2014) studies the verbal strategies used by bloggers, and she thinks that “writers participate actively with their own comments regardless of the veracity of the gossip” (p. 33). Winch (2012) focuses on the feminism and thinks that celebrity culture in gossip blogs place women under merciless scrutiny. However, these studies always ignore the reasons why the audiences have the tendency to gossip. According to this consideration, we try to put gossip on the social network sites and analyze audiences' tendency to gossip from parasocial interaction, perceived celebrity credibility and attitudes towards celebrity gossip, and try to find some relations among them.

Literature Review

The theory of planned behavior (TPB)

TPB is proposed by Ajzen (1991), which can be used in predicting behavior and intention. It is one of the theoretical frameworks proposed to deal with the psychological processes involved when behavioral dispositions, such as social attitude and personality trait, have played an important role in the attempts to predict and explain human behavior in psychology. In the theoretical framework, behavior is decided by intention and perceived behavioral control, and intention is decided by attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.

There are fruitful communication researches exploring the relationship between people's attitudes towards behavior and behavioral intention. For instance, Cronan and Al-Rafee (2008) conduct the study to find the factors that influence the intention to pirate software and media confirm. The result shows that there is a positive relationship between attitude and intention. Alfred & Chou (2013) conduct a study to explore the drivers for workplace gossip also find the positive relationship between attitude and intention.

Gossip and Celebrity gossip

The definition of gossip is variable and may refer to multiple things. When talking about gossip, some people may consider it into a negative way, just like rumor. In this consideration, gossip means undesirable social activity, which has harmful effects for the person (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). However, nowadays, gossip can be described in a neutral way. Tommaso and Lorenzo (2014) consider gossip as the activity of exchanging the single or cluster of peculiar information which involves more than one people. Nevo and Derech-Zehavi (1993) think gossip refers to the communication associated with the third parties. Rosnow and Fine (1976) also

describe gossip as spoken or printed news about the other people, no matter how positive or negative it is.

When thinking the gossip as the celebrity gossip, the gossip of celebrity can be explained as “an active engagement with celebrity culture” (Meyers, 2010), which emphasizes on interactivity. Some specialists think gossip cannot be excluded from celebrity, especially if gossip means talk about others (Davis & McLeod, 2003; Schely-Newman, 2004) and always about “private lives of celebrity” (De Backer et al., 2007). Thus, in this article, celebrity gossip is defined as an active engagement about talking private lives of celebrities.

Perceived celebrity credibility (PCC)

The past studies about source credibility demonstrate that the more credible the source presents itself, the more likely the people to be persuaded (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Ohanian, 1991; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholakia, 1978). Scholars in the broader communication discipline have paid substantial attention to the assessment of perceived credibility (McCroskey & Young, 1981), or “judgments related to another’s character, dependability, and truthfulness” (Dunbar et al., 2015, p. 650). Although it is a multi-faceted conception, source credibility formulates its own model, which tries to describe the key variables or constituents that constructs source credibility (Chew & Kim, 1994; Ohanian, 1990). There are two most common dimensions of source credibility, that is, expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McCracken, 1989; Ohanian, 1991). The dimension of expertise is defined as “the perceived ability of source to make valid assertions” (McCracken, 1989, p. 311), to what extent the communicator is deemed to convey valid and precise information or elaborate a specific subject (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). As for the dimension of trustworthiness, it refers to “the perceived willingness of the source to make

valid assertions”, which means to what extent the receivers believe that the communicator conveys information in a sincere, fair, honest and honorable way (Nelson & Pearson, 1988; Ohanian, 1991). Another important dimension in source credibility is attractiveness (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Caballero & Solomon, 1984; Choi, Lee, & Kim, 2005; McGuire, 1958). It indicates the perceived social value of the source, such as personality, social status, physical appearance, or similarity to the receivers (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). The audiences often more like the endorsers who are physically attractive and have a positive effect on attitude changes and product evaluations (DeSarbo & Harshman, 1985; Joseph, 1982). In previous studies about perceived source credibility, the three dimensions of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness always provide as a theoretical model when the information source is an endorser or spokesman in advertisement campaign. But for celebrities, as public personae, have built their visual figures and characteristics through different media channels in their career life (Chu & Kamal, 2008). A multitude of positive characteristics are attributed to the physically attractive, as well as certain positive behaviors being demonstrated towards them (Caballero & Solomon, 1984). Therefore, the perceived celebrity credibility may mainly rely on celebrities’ attractiveness and trustworthiness, whereas expertise is a less practicable predictor because celebrities are less likely to act as experts and make valid assertions by themselves when they get involved in social network gossip as privies.

Numerous researches have studied the internal impact of the perceived credibility of communicator on receivers’ attitudes, the results show that credible communicators have a greater impact on attitudes, or attitudes change (Pornpitakpan, 2004), than communicators who are less credible (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). They also examine the influence of source credibility on the audience’s attitudes and behavioral responses. These

studies indicate that the sources with high credibility induce more positive attitudes and produce more behavioral compliance than those who are less credible (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1991; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). Studies also demonstrate the two dimensions of PCC, perceived trustworthiness and attractiveness are positively related to attitudes change (Gilly, Graham, Wolfenbarger, & Yale, 1998; Harmon & Coney, 1982; Lasca, Bearden, & Rose, 1995). However, these researches mainly talk about the perceived source credibility in advertising or buy and lease conditions. Few approaches studied celebrity as information source in social network environment and the potential effect of PCC on people's attitudes when those celebrities get involved into some gossip. Thus, our study focuses on PCC in gossip situation on social network sites.

H1: The celebrities with higher perceived credibility induce more positive attitudes towards gossip related to them.

Attitudes towards gossip (ATG) and tendency to gossip

Attitude is one of the conceptually independent determinants of intention in the theory of planned behavior. It can be considered as the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about the nature of the behavior (Litman, Huang, & Chang, 2009). When the specific behavior refers to gossip in the present research, we use ATG to measure the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of gossip.

A behavioral intention is defined as "a person's subjective probability that he will perform some behavior" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). When focusing on tendency to gossip, it does not mean the actual gossip. In the article about tanning addiction tendency, tendency is defined as a high likelihood of tanning (Smita, Jennifer, & Kathryn, 2015). So, we substitute "tendency" for "intention". In this research, tendency to gossip is defined as the willingness of talking about

private lives of celebrity.

The previous study about tendency to gossip is always focusing on its effect in different environment. One article focuses on the organization, indicating that the negative impact of the tendency to gossip can be constrained by organizational identification (Decoster et al., 2013). One article puts tendency to gossip in a cross-cultural environment. It implies that the tendency to gossip can contribute to the sociocultural adaptation of international students (Lee & Pistole, 2014). In this article, we put tendency on social network sites.

According to the positive relationship between attitude and intention TPB states before, we believe there is a positive relationship between the ATG and tendency to gossip, in particular, celebrity gossip:

H2: More positive attitudes towards celebrity gossip predict higher tendency to gossip celebrities.

Due to the positive relations between PCC and ATG, as well as ATG and tendency to gossip. We consider there would be a positive relation directly between perceived celebrity credibility and tendency to gossip.

However, no literatures point out this relation in online celebrity gossip condition. Thus, we make a research question here:

RQ1: Is there a positive relation between perceived celebrity credibility and tendency to gossip celebrities directly?

Parasocial interaction (PSI)

As a concrete manifestation of the individualized and subjective ideological presented to the public in an edited celebrity image, the history of celebrity has been studied by numerous scholars (Meyers, 2010, p. 16). Nowadays, there are critical and interesting media phenomenons

changing the way people interacting with their adored media characters. Especially the development of social media enables audiences to have highly intimate and personal interactions to build relationships with celebrities (Chung & Cho, 2014, p. 47). Hence, there is a special and significant relationship deserving more explorations in parasocial relationship.

According to Horton and Wohl (1956), parasocial relationship is a “simulacrum of conversational give and take” between audience and media characters, which is formed in terms of direct address, private, and personal conversation style of the media character (p. 4). De Backer et al. (2007) indicate, the interactions of ordinary individuals with celebrities is that celebrities discourse their private lives to audience, or they have done such things involuntarily. In this way, audiences respond emotionally towards those celebrities, but audiences do not share their private lives with celebrities, which is to some extent peculiar (p. 340). Such type of interaction lacking reciprocity is called parasocial interaction (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Turner, 2004).

Early research announces that parasocial interaction develops to compensate for inferior social life (Rosengren & Windahl, 1972). However, succeeding studies raise some different conclusions. According to Giles (2002), natural psychological processes used in face-to-face relationships are likewise used in parasocial relationship, which means that parasocial interaction is supposed to be viewed as “the realm of ordinary social interaction (p. 279). Numerous scholars have conducted to investigate PSI within diverse contexts, including journalists (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985), television characters (Rubin & Perse, 1987), video game avatars (Jin & Park, 2009), and sports celebrities (Sun & Wu, 2012, p. 136). Recently, scholars begin to explore PSI research within social media contexts due to theoretical and practical importance (Ledbetter & Redd, 2016). For instance, Frederick et al. (2012) illustrate that PSI plays a vital role in reducing

perceptions of uncertainty and social attraction for sports celebrities. According to Labrecque (2014), consumer trust and loyalty towards a brand are likely to be built based upon PSI via social media, because interactivity and openness of the brand can stem from PSI via social media. De Backer et al. (2007) reason that, when building parasocial interaction, celebrities are one-way parasocial members in our social networks. Hence, celebrities are likely to be regarded as one-way lovers, friends, or rivals to someone who encounter these stars in social media, and view them to be part of their ordinary social network sites, which more or less explains why people have intention to learn about specific celebrities (p. 340). Overwhelmingly, Horton and Wohl (1956) reason that behaviors of individuals may be influenced, once they are immersed in PSI relationship. For example, Xiang et al. (2016) illustrate that PSI positively influences audiences' intensive buying behaviors on social commerce platform. Applying such result to our study, someone is similarly possible to get involved in talking about gossip about deviant information related to traits or behaviors of celebrities (De Backer et al., 2007).

Compared to traditional media channels, social media such as Twitter and Facebook (Weibo in China), celebrities are likely to create and strengthen consumers and fans alike, as well as PSI relationship (Ballantine & Martin, 2005; Xiang et al., 2016). Similarly, De Backer et al. (2007) conduct an extremely interesting research, they announce that use of media could positively influence audiences' interests in celebrity gossip according to a qualitative survey, and this interests resulted from the parasocial bonds they developed with celebrities through in-depth interview (p. 340). Besides, Giles (2002) elaborates that one of basic characteristics of conceptualizing PSI is interest, which are also supported by Kanazawa's (2004) study: the interest in celebrity gossip as a function of constituting one-way social bonds with these individuals. As mentioned above, social media offers more opportunities for users to have

communication with celebrities, in this way, PSI is more likely to be developed between audiences and celebrities (p. 24). Moreover, the questionnaire designed to measure tendency to gossip accessing “individual differences in thoughts and feelings concerning gossip and comprised primarily of items that ask how frequently respondents transmit gossip and also their enjoyment in so doing”, which reflects socialization behavior and interpersonal “curiosity” (Nevo et al., 1994). Thus, in context of social media networking sites, there might be a correlation between PIS and audiences’ intention to spread celebrity gossip, and we propose a hypothesis:

H3: Higher parasocial interaction with celebrities leads to higher tendency to gossip celebrities.

PCC and PSI

There are fruitful researches exploring PSI in business contexts, both traditional and new media channels. Some PSI studies also talk about organizations and celebrity promoting their brand images or personal liking (Frederick et al., 2012; Labrecque, 2014). Thus, it is obvious to announce that organizations and celebrities intend to apply PSI to sell their products or promote brand images, which is quite frequent in social media. According to Marwick and Boyd (2011), celebrities are likely to promote their PSI through social media methods, aiming to cultivate intimacy, liking, as well as credibility from their followers. Goldsmith et al. (2000) indicate that perceived credibility plays a vital role when celebrities sustain endorsement contacts with audiences. Besides, several researches are conducted to emphasize the potential advancement of celebrity images and interactions between sport celebrities and audiences via social media (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Frederick et al., 2012; Men & Tsai, 2015). Furthermore, earlier scholars also conduct a research and find there is a positive relationship

between PSI and perceived credibility of organization (Labrecque, 2014).

Although abundant researches related to PSI and credibility have been presented by previous researchers, they are more likely to focus on the overall contexts of social media. For instance, Ledbetter and Redd (2016) frame a significant research, which illustrates that interest and problem-solving dimensions of PSI predict credibility of the celebrity. Whereas group identification dimension of PSI predicts perceived credibility via interaction effects with social media platforms.

Therefore, we propose a hypothesis to test the correlation between PSI and PCC within a specific context of gossiping celebrity on SNS:

H4: Higher parasocial interaction with celebrities leads to higher perceived credibility about celebrities.

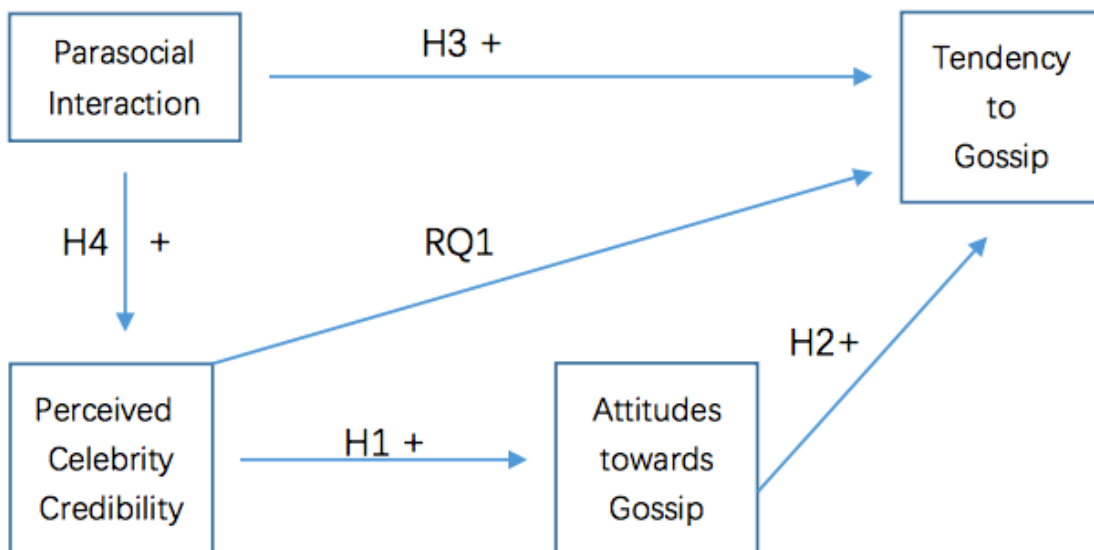


Figure 1. The Impact on Tendency to Gossip

Method

Sampling

A cross-sectional survey was conducted in November 2016 to test the four hypotheses and one research question described above. The population of interest for this study is people who use social network sites regularly. A convenience sample was utilized in this study due to the budget limitation. In the beginning of questionnaire, purpose of the research, anonymity, and confidentiality of the survey were declared. 300 questionnaires including eight groups of questions on key variables and demographics were formally distributed via two mainstream social network applications in China, Wechat and Tencent QQ, and eventually 201 valid responses were collected. Before inputting collected questionnaire data in SPSS to work on analysis, data processing procedures have been employed in the research. The collected data has been reviewed carefully to make sure that all cells have been filled, and specific data was checked to make sure that there were no outliers in the cells. From valid returned questionnaires, the percentages of male and female are 25.87% and 74.13% respectively. The average age of respondents was 25.53 ranging from 15 to 55. 50.75% of the sample came from students and undergraduates made up of the majority part of our subjects, which is 44.78%.

Measurement of key variables

Before conducting the formal survey, a pretest of the questionnaire was undertaken by 20 students in City University of Hong Kong for avoiding biased and inappropriate questions in the following study. The measurements of the variables were all adapted from relevant previous researches. Two variables of *Parasocial interaction* and *Attitudes towards Gossip* were measured by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, whereas other two variables were measured by bipolar scale and verbal frequency scale. A reliability test was

conducted to confirm the measurement of the variables.

Perceived celebrity credibility refers to the judgments related to celebrity's character, dependability, and truthfulness. It was measured by two dimensions of perceived source credibility with an index of eight items adapted from the scales developed by Ohanian (1990). Four items measured perceived attractiveness and four items measured perceived trustworthiness, respectively: (1) ugly, (2) beautiful, (3) unattractive, (4) attractive, (5) dishonest, (6) honest, (7) untrustworthy, (8) trustworthy. A five-point bipolar scale which consists of very much, somewhat, neither was utilized to measure perceived celebrity credibility ($M = 4.367$, $SD = .659$, $\alpha = .858$).

Parasocial interaction refers to simulacrum of conversational give and take between audience and media characters, which is formed in terms of direct address, private, and personal conversation style of the media character. The retained PSI scale with eight items revised by Sun and Wu (2012) testing the parasocial relationship between individuals' and their favorite sports celebrities, which is based on the classical PSI scale developed by Rubin et al. (1985) to assess parasocial relationship with celebrity was utilized to measure PSI: (1) The celebrity is like an old friend, (2) The celebrity keeps me company when the program is on media, (3) The celebrity reminds me of myself, (4) I have the same qualities as the celebrity, (5) I miss seeing the celebrity when he or she does not show on media, (6) I care about what happens to the celebrity (7) The celebrity interactions similar to mine with friends, (8) The celebrity interactions similar to mine with family. The eight items were added and then divided by eight to create a composite measure of parasocial interaction ($M = 3.133$, $SD = .824$, $\alpha = .897$).

Attitudes Towards Gossip refers to the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of gossip. ATG scale is developed by Litman and Pezzo (2005), which aims at assessing individual differences in people's thoughts and feelings about

gossip and measuring the degree to which gossip is viewed positively. Litman, Huang and Chang (2009) retain a translated one to adapt Chinese society based on the investigation of 504 Taiwanese participants. The Chinese version of ATG scale including ten items measuring both social value and moral value was adapted to fit the sample: (1) Gossiping about celebrity is a great way to while away time, (2) It's very enjoyable to talk about celebrity, (3) I like to share the things (about celebrity) I hear, (4) Celebrity gossip is a good ice-breaker, (5) I love to know what's happening to other celebrity's lives, (6) Regardless of whether a celebrity gossip is true or not you should never mention it, (7) Celebrity gossip is fearful, (8) It's wrong to talk about celebrities behind their back, (9) Celebrity gossip is not worth trusting, (10) Rumors are rarely true. The ten items were added and then divided by ten to create a composite measure of attitudes towards gossip ($M = 3.423$, $SD = .531$, $\alpha = .724$).

Tendency to Gossip refers to the willingness of talking about private lives of celebrity. The 20-item tendency to gossip questionnaire (Nevo et al., 1993) is broadly used in different papers about tendency to gossip. It divided the twenty items into four dimensions. In the process of pretest, we adopted four dimensions with two most related items each to measure subjects' tendency to gossip. However, some participants responded that some questions were unnecessary and confusing. Their choices were likely to be influenced by these questions, which all refer to the same dimension, sublimated gossip. Thus, we refined our measurement by deleting this dimension and applied three dimensions with two items each (six items total) to measure tendency to gossip: (1) Talk with friends about relationships between male celebrities and female celebrities, (2) Talk with friends about celebrities' personal appearance, (3) Talk with friends about educational level of celebrities, (4) Talk with friends about other people's success at work, (5) Can contribute interesting information in conversations about celebrities, (6) Know what is

going on, who is dating etc. All items are captured by unitizing a 7-point verbal frequency scale which consists of never, rarely, occasionally, sometimes, frequently, usually, every time ($M = 3.778$, $SD = 1.283$, $\alpha = .925$).

The reliability criteria is used according to Cronbach's Alpha which is higher than .70, and the results suggest that all the constructs have good reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Findings

Initially, a linear regression test was conducted to test the hypotheses. Using linear regression, it is clear to see how the three independent variables influence (PSI, PCC, and ATG) the tendency to gossip celebrity on SNSs. Furthermore, complicated regressions among three variables in the mentioned model also have been to studied, since multiple regression analysis assists to analyze how them regressed simultaneously on independent variable (TTG) in the model.

Results of simple linear regression statistics will be reported in Table 2 as followed. Hypothesis 1, which surmised that the celebrities with higher perceived credibility induced more positive attitudes towards gossip related to them, which was supported ($\beta = .217$, $p < .05^*$, $R^2 = .047$). Hypothesis 2, which concluded that more positive attitudes towards celebrity gossip predict higher tendency to gossip celebrities, was supported ($\beta = .532$, $p < .001^{***}$, $R^2 = .028$). Research question 1, which intended to test whether celebrity with higher perceived credibility directly predicts higher tendency to gossip celebrities, was supported ($\beta = .265$, $p < .001^{***}$, $R^2 = .070$). Hypothesis 3, which indicated that higher parasocial interaction with celebrities leads to higher tendency to gossip celebrities, was supported ($\beta = .315$, $p < .001^{***}$, $R^2 = .094$). Hypothesis 4, higher parasocial interaction with celebrities leads to higher perceived credibility

about celebrities, which was also supported ($\beta = .355, p < .001^{***}, R^2 = .122$).

As shown in Table 3, the results of multiple regression analysis by employing enter method is available below. As a model with three independents, multiple linear regression was calculated to predict TTG based on PCC, PSI, and ATG. A significant regression equation was found ($F(3, 196) = 30.782, p < .001^{***}$), with a R^2 of .319. The R square value for the equation as a whole is .319, implying that about 32 percent of the variance in the equation could be explained by the three variables (PCC, PSI, and ATG). The results signify that when PSI, PPC, and ATG influence TTG simultaneously in the established model, PSI ($\beta = .124, p > .05$) and PPC ($\beta = .120, p > .05$) contribute little to individuals' TTG on SNSs, due to the fact that significant level values are much higher than .05. However, the statistic results implied that people with more positive attitudes towards gossip, the more tendency they will show when they face celebrity gossip on SNSs ($\beta = .467, p < .001^{***}$).

Discussion

Overall, the results show that there are complicated and vital factors influencing individual's tendency to gossip celebrities on social network sites which include parasocial interaction, perceived celebrity credibility, and attitudes towards gossip based on a part of theory of planned behavior. The research helps to interpret the motivation people being interested in celebrities' gossip. The particular and multifaceted implications of these findings for research are amplified in following discussion.

In the web 2.0 era, for the feature of user generated content, social network is more like a public platform where people can get and post the information they prefer. Celebrities, as a part of users, can easily transfer information to other users and build connections to contact with them, including the information of gossips. Different from previous researches about perceived

credibility and gossip in workplace about colleagues or gossip about celebrities in advertising campaign, perceived credibility of celebrities may have a more complicated impact on the fulminic, viral, influential online information delivery as well as receivers' attitudes and behaviors changing. The findings of the study indicate the positive role of PCC in predicting audiences' ATG. People might consider gossip as an affirmative behavior if the celebrity who gets involved in the gossip condition being perceived credible. A defensive point of view and spotlight chasing perspective are the possible reasons to motivate people react like this. When the attitudes towards gossip turn to tendency to gossip, PCC also plays a vital role in the process, confirming the positive relation between PCC and TTG through the positive prediction of ATG towards TTG which is supported by theory of planned behavior. However, the findings of study reveal that PCC fails to predict TTG when they are in the theoretical model as proposed earlier ($\beta = .120, p > .05$). A reason for the insignificance of effect could be the interruption of other predictors that play a role in the celebrity gossip diffusion.

The attitudes towards gossip was found to be positively related to the tendency to gossip ($\beta = .532, p < .001^{***}, R^2 = .028$). This finding is consistent with past research on the ATG in organization, which discuss the employee's attitude influence the tendency to gossip (Decoster et al., 2013). In this article, relationship between them is test to be right by putting them in a new circumstance, indicating that the social network environment does not have vital impact on it.

Another inspiring finding which parallels our hypothesis 3 that higher parasocial interaction with celebrities predicts more increasing tendency to gossip celebrities, expanding our knowledge about the impetus people develop to have chitchats about celebrities on SNSs. De Backer et al. (2007) conducted an in-depth interview research to find that the interest is the dynamic power for individuals to form PSI relationship with celebrities, and interest also plays a

critical role facilitating one to have intention to learn about celebrities (Kanazawa, 2004). In present research, the association between PSI of SNS users and their tendency to gossip is examined via survey, which empirically test the qualitative results collected by Kanazawa (2004) and De Backer et al. (2007) through quantitative research methods. More specifically, increasing amounts of SNSs around the world actually impacting ways individuals intimately interact with characters or celebrities on social media, and they are provided with more possibilities to get know celebrities from different media channels. Therefore, the present findings are likely to inspect PSI and audiences' following behaviors within SNS gossiping contexts from a more objective perspective.

Meanwhile, the findings also contribute to media study by providing more thoroughly concrete quantitative research, which explores the association between PSI and PCC within SNS gossip, due to the reasons that it has been mostly tested through organizational relationship. Hypothesis 4 in present research somehow confirms a reality: when individuals using SNSs, to some extents the parasocial interaction developed with celebrities does really impact how they perceive credibility of celebrities. Particularly, the story is easy to understand in the real world setting, especially new media becoming increasingly ubiquitous. In the digital age, interactions with celebrities on SNSs could foster individuals' liking and intimacy, since diverse online platforms offer individuals increasing amounts of opportunities to interact with them, such as reading their blogs, posting comments, and learning what happen on them recently. But previous literatures have found that celebrities' posting frequency moderated the correlation between PSI and PCC, and our finding confirms this conclusion by developing a more direct correlation.

When it comes to model proposed in the research, statistics results imply that when PSI, PCC, and ATG enter a model to influence TTG at the same time, ATG yield out the most great

contribution to TTG in the model, while PCC and PSI showed little influence. Nevertheless, the whole model made some sense, three variables working together would influence the users' tendency to gossip celebrity on SNSs obviously ($R^2 = .319$). Previous researches have studied the correlation between ATG and TTG, there are abundant and intensive findings related them. Litman and Pezzo (2005) found that men are somewhat less concerned about the appropriateness and truthfulness of gossip (p. 968). Nevertheless, females made up of the greatest amounts of participants in presented research, and gossip attitudes actually varying from samples (Litman & Pezzo, 2005). Therefore, the demographic factor is considered to be a vital element influencing the statistics results as well as findings. Litman and Pezzo (2005) also composed contents of gossip affect one's tendency to gossip: participants tended to show more interest and more willingness to transmit positive gossip, but individuals with more negative ATG tend to transmit negative gossip. As for our research, specific sort of gossip was not distinguished on questionnaire, which is possible to influence participants' answers.

In the research model, PSI and PCC contribute little on impacting users' tendency to gossip celebrities on SNSs, and two propositions have been brought forward to explain the situation. Initially, given the lack of clear theoretical research connecting parasocial interaction, perceived credibility, and attitudes towards gossip concurrently, interactions between the three variables earn little attention from communication scholars. In particular, Cronan and Al-Rafee (2007) find the factors that influence the intention to pirate software and media, which shows the possibility that there is a correlation between attitudes and participants' following intention to behave. Specifically, attitudes towards gossip is a complicated concept, and our research did not explore how ATG acts on PCC and PSI. It is reasonable to assume that individuals' attitudes towards gossip influence the processes they develop parasocial interaction with celebrities, and

the perceptions of celebrities' credibility especially on social network sites. Secondly, according to the statistics results, the standardized coefficient values of hypothesis likewise deserve mentioning: β value of the regression coefficient between PSI and TTG, PSI and PCC, PCC and TTG are respectively .315, .355, and .265. The results provide statistics bases to analyze that the influence made by PSI on PCC neutralizes the correlation between PCC and TTG ($\beta = .265$).

Some limitations of present study deserve noticing and need to be treated with caution. First is that sampling process is comparatively unrepresentative, due to the fact that convenience sample is chosen considering budget limitation. In this way, biased age, gender, and educational backgrounds are structures of the sample may result in sampling error skewing the data results. Therefore, the further studies may choose to adopt more appropriate sampling method with larger sample size and balanced demographics. We suggest that future studies should employ different research designs, such as a longitudinal study, experimental research, qualitative research, or a multi-method approach in order to further validate the findings of this study.

Second, the research focuses use of social network site in mainland China, which is somewhat limited to infer the findings to western societies, so we suggest further studies could apply our findings in Facebook and twitter or other foreign network sites. More concrete contexts could be applied in future studies such as types of gossip, types of celebrities and the terminal the consumer use to view gossip.

Besides, our findings solely examined the consequences simultaneously brought by the three variables to impact on participants' tendency to gossip celebrities on SNSs, which means that the interactions between parasocial interaction, perceived celebrity credibility, and attitudes towards gossip are overlooked to be explored. Thus, it is rational to suggest that future studies could focus on the specific interrelations between PCC, PSI, and ATG. More concretely, as

explicated above, the regression coefficient values of imply that ATG in different contexts could give rise to PCC and PSI, so we suggest future studies could conduct models involving the three variables diversely to examine the exactly complicated correlations among them.

Conclusion

This study tested three predictors of the tendency to gossip which are PSI, PCC and ATG on the Chinese social network sites. Findings of the study furthers previous studies on the tendency to gossip and we applied the TPB as a basis theory to conduct the research. It is novel to connect the three elements PSI, PCC, and ATG as predictors to examine how they influence TTG concurrently within new media situation. In particular, an originally designed model aims testing the multiple interactions among variables has been brought forward. Besides the model, the study also tested how PCC, PSI, and ATG work on TTG separately, trying to improve our understandings of individuals' TTG on SNSs in communication field.

There are several new findings in the study. When examining the tendency to gossip celebrities on SNSs, this study advanced the academic exploration of new media platform. It has illustrated upon new attempt by combining these factors together and put it in the new media environment to study tendency to gossip. The novel perspective implies that PCC, PSI, and ATG particularly influence TTG within social media context, expanding our understanding of the certain type of behaviors from traditional situations, such as interpersonal and organizational communication to multimedia situation. It is especially significant to examine how individuals behave facing celebrity gossip, due to the fact that internet has always played a vital role in production and consumption of media by blurring the lines of difference between consumers and producers (Meyers, 2010). The consideration of the interaction between normal ones and celebrities would integrate new insights into future examination of related issues. Second, the

study testified a proposition of direct correlation between PCC and TTG, which used to be explored by few scholars. The finding established the theoretical base by drawing on the theory of planned behavior, demonstrating perceived celebrity credibility playing an obvious role to influence one's tendency to gossip celebrity on SNSs. The novel finding offers a discerning consideration about cognition and intention related to celebrity gossip in complicated multimedia situation.

The findings on the proposed model suggest integrated effect of PCC, PSI and ATG concurrently work on TTG, but PCC and PSI show little contribution to TTG comparing ATG. The origin findings highlight the complexities of psychological cognition and relationship. The proposed model emphasizes the significant roles in the diffusion and use of the SNSs played by three sets of psychological concepts: namely, PCC, PSI, and ATG, above and beyond the influence of individuals' demographic and personal characteristics. A more astonishing finding, as least to us, is that ATG shows more efficacy influencing TTG comparing with PSI and PCC, which appear to imply the importance of correlation between attitudes and behaviors as TPB assumed.

These new findings provide several meaningful implications, the change in the contexts of communication is less likely to attenuate the efficacy between three independent variables and tendency to gossip. Being different from traditional communication channels, multimedia has brought changes of the ways how celebrities interact with the audiences. Nevertheless, regarding celebrities as close friends under influences brought by PSI actually is a pseudo psychological relationship bring following behaviors, specifically, people's tendency to gossip about the related celebrities. In short, the study suggests that PCC, PSI, and ATG are vital conditions to impact individuals' TTG within new media context, whereas ATG is a more sufficient one to result in

impacts on TTG no matter the three variables work at the same time or discretely.

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Appendix A.**Questionnaire: Celebrity Gossip on Social Network Sites**

Dear all, we are the students in City University of Hong Kong. In order to complete an academic research of the course we take, we invite you to participate in our research. The purpose of the questionnaire is to learn something about your willingness to participate in gossip on social network sites. All your answers will be carefully recorded in an anonymous way and will only be used for research purpose. It might only take you about 10 minutes. The choices you make are valuable for us. Thank you for your participation.

A1: How do you perceive your favorite celebrity? (How do you think of him/her?)

	Very much	Somewhat	Neither	Somewhat	Very much	
Ugly	1	2	3	4	5	Beautiful
Unattractive	1	2	3	4	5	Attractive
Dishonest	1	2	3	4	5	Honest
Untrustworthy	1	2	3	4	5	Trustworthy

Notes: e.g. 1 = very ugly, 2 = somewhat ugly, 3 = neither, 4 = somewhat beautiful, 5 = very beautiful.

A2: You think your favorite celebrity:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I think my favorite celebrity is like an old friend	1	2	3	4	5
My favorite celebrity keeps me company when the program is on media	1	2	3	4	5
My favorite celebrity reminds me of myself	1	2	3	4	5
I have the same qualities as my favorite celebrity	1	2	3	4	5
I miss seeing my favorite celebrity when he or she does not show on media	1	2	3	4	5

I care about what happens to my favorite celebrity.	1	2	3	4	5
My favorite celebrity interactions similar to mine with friends.	1	2	3	4	5
My favorite celebrity interactions similar to mine with family	1	2	3	4	5

A3: Your attitude towards celebrity gossip:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Gossiping about celebrity is a great way to while away time	1	2	3	4	5
It's very enjoyable to talk about celebrity	1	2	3	4	5
I like to share the things (about celebrity) I hear	1	2	3	4	5
Celebrity gossip is a good ice-breaker	1	2	3	4	5
I love to know what's happening to other celebrity's lives	1	2	3	4	5
Regardless of whether a celebrity gossip is true or not you should never mention it	1	2	3	4	5
Celebrity gossip is fearful	1	2	3	4	5

It's wrong to talk about celebrities behind their back	1	2	3	4	5
Celebrity gossip is not worth trusting	1	2	3	4	5
Rumors are rarely true.	1	2	3	5	5

A4: On the social network sites, you will:

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Frequently	Usually	Every Time
Talk with friends about relationships between male celebrities and female celebrities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Talk with friends about celebrities' personal appearance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Talk with friends about educational level of celebrities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Talk with friends about other people's success at work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Can contribute interesting information in conversations about celebrities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Know what is going on, who is dating etc.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Notes: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, in less than 10% of the chances when I could have, 3 = Occasionally, in about 30% of the chances when I could have, 4 = Sometimes, in about 50% of the chances when I could have, 5 = Frequently, in about 70% of the chances when I could have, 6 = Usually, in about 90% of the chances I could have, 7 = Every time.

T. Background

T1. Your precisely age is _____ years.

T2. Your gender _____.

Male	1
Female	2

T3. Education Background

Junior High School or Below	1
High School	2
Undergraduate	3
Master or Above	4

T4. Occupation Background

Student	1
Enterprise Staff Member	2
Professionals (Lawyer, Teacher, Doctors etc.)	3
Blue-collar (Worker, Service, Driver etc.)	4
Freelance/Self-employed	5
Retires/unemployed	6
Others	7

We are appreciated for you to participate this survey.

Appendix B.

Table 1. Basic Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach Alpha (N=201).

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α
Perceived Celebrity Credibility	4.367	.659	.858
Parasocial interaction scale	3.133	.824	.897
Attitudes towards Gossip	3.423	.531	.724
Tendency to Gossip	3.778	1.283	.925

Table 2. Tests of linear regressions between variables (N = 201).

Variables	<i>TTG</i>				<i>ATG (H1+)</i>				<i>PCC (H4+)</i>			
	Standardized coefficient β	<i>R</i>	<i>Adjusted R</i>	<i>p</i>	Standardized coefficient β	<i>R</i>	<i>Adjusted R</i>	<i>p</i>	Standardized coefficient β	<i>R</i>	<i>Adjusted R</i>	<i>p</i>
PCC(RQ1+)	.265	.070	.066	.000***	.217	.047	.042	.020*				
PSI(H3+)	.315	.099	.094	.000***					.355	.126	.122	.000***
ATG(H2+)	.532	.283	.280	.000***								

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 3. Multiple regression in proposed model (N = 201).

Variables	Tendency towards Gossip	
	Sig.	Standardized Coefficient β
Perceived Celebrity Credibility	.600	.120
Parasocial Interaction	.590	.124
Attitudes towards Gossip	.000***	.467
R square	.319	
Adjust R square	.309	
R square change	.319	
Significance of change	.000	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$